



Australian Bureau of Statistics

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Local Government and ABS is a quarterly newsletter created by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) aimed at helping the Local Government Sector use statistics to assist with planning and other community servicing decisions.

A specific aim of this newsletter is to help you easily find information on the ABS website. It explains the structure of the ABS website and provides direct electronic links to statistical series of use to local government. Electronic links are coloured and underlined and can be activated using the mouse button. Statistical terms are also explained to help make sense of more complex data.

Local Government and ABS provides a central contact point where you can provide your views and suggestions as to how the ABS can better assist local government.

We encourage you to forward this newsletter to others and post it on your bulletin board. Anyone is welcome to receive Local Government and ABS. To subscribe, just send an email to claire.conroy@abs.gov.au with "subscribe Local Government and ABS" in the subject line. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter please unsubscribe by sending an email to claire.conroy@abs.gov.au with "unsubscribe Local Government and ABS" in the subject line.

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Change of contact officer

Jeff Bulger, the Local Government Sector Account Manager (LGAM) and the contact officer for this Newsletter, has moved to a new position within the ABS. His departure has meant this edition has been released slightly later than usual, and a replacement for the LGAM position has not yet been appointed. In the interim, apart from subscribing/unsubscribing requests as above, please refer all enquiries to cynthia.millar@abs.gov.au

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Introduction to other ABS Classifications

All local government agencies which collect information for administrative, regulatory or other purposes have an in-house information store which could potentially provide valuable management information in data format. For councils, this information is useful for benchmarking purposes, for measuring operational efficiencies, and for comparative information on the performance of other councils where data are available and assuming they are alike or at least similar to your council's data.

The use of a common statistical frameworks throughout Australia facilitates true comparability between

statistics. Statistics collected and disseminated on recognised frameworks enrich data sources that can be drawn upon by the community for decision-making purposes as well as measuring the effectiveness of service delivery and other programs.

Classifications are the cornerstone of statistics and the reliability and comparability of statistical data hinge on their use. Introduction to Classifications aims to encourage the wider application of national classification systems by other producers of statistics than the ABS, including local government organisations. This would enhance the generation of statistics that can be used in conjunction with the statistical output of the ABS and other bodies. More detailed information on classification use is available from [**A Guide to Major ABS Classifications, 1998 \(ABS Cat no. 1291.0\)**](#).

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Key steps to running a survey

In the previous Newsletter we discussed how to **conduct a research project**. If existing data is not available, you may decide to undertake a survey to collect your own data. Key steps in running a survey identifies the key issues to be considered when conducting a survey. If you don't know where to start, this reference will be of help as it provides a step-by-step guide beginning with identifying your aims right through to presenting a report on the completed survey.

More detailed information is available from [**An Introduction to Sample Surveys, A Users Guide ABS Cat. No. 1299.0**](#)

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SEIFA 2001 - a comprehensive profile of the Australian people

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) 2001 is a powerful analytical tool for those interested in measuring the social and economic conditions of Australian communities. Derived from information collected in the 2001 Census of Population and Housing, SEIFA 2001 consists of four separate indexes - each detailing a different aspect of an area's social and economic well-being.

The 2001 Census provides extensive information on a number of social and economic concepts, such as income, education and occupation. However each of these subjects in isolation may not give a full indication of the social and economic conditions in a particular area. SEIFA 2001 combines all these items into a series of summary measures that enable you to investigate the socio-economic well-being of Australia's communities.

The four indexes that make up SEIFA 2001 are:

- **Index of Advantage/Disadvantage** – This index is a continuum of advantage to disadvantage. It takes into account variables such as the proportion of families with high incomes, people with a tertiary education, and people employed in a skilled occupation.
- **Index of Disadvantage** – Focuses on attributes such as low income, low educational attainment and high unemployment.
- **Index of Economic Resources** – This index is derived from variables relating to the income, expenditure and assets of families, such as family income, rent paid, mortgage repayments, and dwelling size.
- **Index of Education and Occupation** – This index takes into account variables such as the proportion of people with a higher qualification or employed in a skilled profession.

High values on each index indicate areas of advantage, while low values correspond to areas of disadvantage.

The SEIFA indexes are available for a wide range of geographic areas, including Local Government Areas, Suburbs, Postal Areas, and Collection Districts. You can also define custom areas to meet your own specifications, such as Wards.

SEIFA has a range of applications for Local Government, and is a valuable tool for research, analysis and social planning. It also provides objective and impartial measures of disadvantage which may assist in

submissions for funding or identifying needy areas for the provision of services.

Many Local Governments are already using SEIFA as a tool to assist in their work, and a range of other organisations also make use of SEIFA for identifying locations for outlets, market segmentation, socio-economic modelling, and more.

SEIFA is available as a stand-alone software package, an Add-On Datapack for CDATA 2001, or as a consultancy service.

For more information on SEIFA 2001, including a number of case studies, please use the following link :
[More information on SEIFA 2001](#)

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What's happening in Local Government Finance

Collections

During the June quarter, personnel from the ABS' Local Government Statistics Unit (LGSU) undertook a series of visits to Departments of Local Government (DLG) and/or Local Government Grants Commissions (GC) throughout Australia in order to review the 2002-03 **annual** survey and to commence preparations for the 2003-04 cycle. Issues discussed included how to improve the collection form where necessary, with an over-riding goal of introducing a minimum of change to the instrument. ABS and DLG/GC representatives brought to the table examples of where it was felt the collection form was in some way unclear or expressed itself in terms unfamiliar to practitioners in a particular state or territory.

In every case the discussions were constructive and it is believed the form for each jurisdiction will represent an improvement on that of the previous year. ABS and DLG/GC staff are now engaged in creating the 2003-04 Excel collection instruments and making attendant IT system changes which will enable the information to be drawn off the forms for processing. Although the despatch date for the various instruments will differ from state to state, some are expected to be issued as early as mid- to late-July, with other jurisdictions following on from then.

Responses to the **quarterly** survey issued on 12 June are also required by 13 July. The form requested only a restricted range of data items but a prompt response is sought in order to ensure the financial activity of local government is accurately represented in Australia's National Accounts which are prepared on a quarterly basis. As always ABS personnel are available to assist councils in completing the form in situations where requirements are unclear.

New Developments

An interesting development within the LGSU is a current project to establish a definitive list - or 'frame' in statistician's parlance - of all organisations in Australia which can be classified as belonging to the local government sector. Local government councils are obvious inclusions in such a list but as well there are many organisations - boards, corporations and the like - which may or not be eligible for inclusion depending, amongst other things, on whether their ownership or control rests with local government. Once the frame is fully developed it will form the basis for selecting statistical samples for any surveys directed to the sector. An accurate frame will also ensure that non-local government units are not included unnecessarily in local government surveys.

Contacts

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Links to previous editions of Local Government and ABS

Local Government and ABS Edition 5 March 2004
Local Government and ABS Edition 4 December 2003
Local Government and ABS Edition 3 September 2003
Local Government and ABS Edition 2 June 2003
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Newsletter contact details

This newsletter is one way to help improve communication between the ABS and the Local Government Sector. New ABS initiatives to assist local government organisations will be announced in this newsletter as they evolve. We would like your views and suggestions about this newsletter so that it remains useful and assists you to understand and use ABS statistics. Please email comments to, cynthia.millar@abs.gov.au or telephone (08) 82377348.

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